

The Status of Girls in Wisconsin



2007 Report

THE STATUS OF GIRLS IN WISCONSIN

Summary Of Major Findings

Demographics

There are more than 360,000 girls aged 10 to 19 in Wisconsin. Statewide, this population of girls is more racially and ethnically diverse than the population of adult women in Wisconsin.

Education

On state education exams, higher percentages of girls are scoring at proficient levels in Math and Science and at advanced levels in Language Arts and Reading, than are boys. More than 50% of Wisconsin's high school girls have aspirations to attend a four year college, and 91% in 12th grade graduate from high school. There are racial and ethnic disparities that are of concern.

Television & Computer Use

Fewer girls than boys watch television for more than two hours at a time. Girls' computer use tends to be more for social purposes than uses by boys. Girls are also less likely to take computer science as a course of study.

Mental Health

Wisconsin girls are more likely to report being depressed, are more likely to participate in self-harm and are more likely to attempt suicide than are boys. (Boys however have more reported suicide completions.) Although 36% of Wisconsin high school girls described themselves as being overweight, only about 6% were actually overweight.

Juvenile Crime

Most young women who become involved in the Juvenile Justice System begin with a "status offense". These offenses include underage drinking, running away, truancy, or curfew violations. Many girls who are offenders have been abused.

Reproductive Health

Thirty-two percent of Wisconsin high school girls report being sexually active. Ninety percent of sexually active high school girls reported using some method of birth control. Births to younger teens have declined in recent years, yet several cities in Wisconsin still report relatively high teen birth rates. According to one study, 42% of girls 15 or younger reported that their first sexual contact was not consensual.

Substance & Alcohol Use

Seventy-six percent of Wisconsin high school girls have reported that they have had at least one alcoholic beverage, and almost one-third of Wisconsin high school girls reported drinking five or more drinks in a row on at least one occasion in the past month. About one-third of girls reported riding in a car with a driver who had been drinking, at least once in the past month.

Violence & Abuse

Reports convey that girls in Wisconsin are abused at an annual rate of 8 per 1,000 (compared to boys at 5 per 1,000). Girls over age 11 are more likely to experience abuse than are boys, whose abuse rates decline as they age.

Physical Activity

Wisconsin girls are less likely to meet recommended levels of physical activity than are Wisconsin boys or girls nationally.

Social Support

In a state survey, most Wisconsin high school girls (91%) reported that they have at least one adult in their lives, besides their parents, to whom they can turn with important concerns.

Executive Summary

Status of Girls in Wisconsin

"Action without study is fatal. Study without action is futile." Mary Beard

The Alverno College Research Center for Women and Girls, in collaboration with the Women's Fund of Greater Milwaukee, the Girl Scouts of Wisconsin, and the Wisconsin Women's Council, is pleased to present our collaborative exploration of the status of girls (ages 10 to 19) in Wisconsin. After the Status of Women in Wisconsin reports were issued in 2002 and 2004, these organizations and others that serve girls in the State raised awareness for the need for companion research on girls as a natural next step. Since a great deal of information about Wisconsin girls is scattered in many different and often difficult-to-find places and documents, a primary goal of this project has been to centralize the information and to make it accessible, not only in print but also via the internet, to a variety of agencies, groups and institutions who have the needs and interests of Wisconsin's girls in mind.

The deeper purpose that motivates this initiative is to improve the quality of lives of girls in the State of Wisconsin. The mission of the report's developers is to assist in this effort by providing a scholarly and impartial, data-based profile of the lives of young women and girls along key demographic, social, and economic dimensions. Consequently this report is provided as a means for promoting discussion of issues that arise from the data.

The goals of the Status of Girls Report are to:

- Provide a centralized source of information on the status of girls in Wisconsin.
- Spark additional research on girls and boys.
- Provide information that will help shape policies and practices that enhance the quality of lives of young women and girls.
- Serve as a catalyst for young women and girls and the agencies that serve them to voice their perspectives on the issues and challenges they face, helping each find answers to their problems.
- Assist partners from the business, education and non-profit sectors to thoughtfully engage the data.
- Provide data that can be used as a baseline to gauge Wisconsin's progress in enhancing programs and services for girls.

Our intent is to present the available data without interpretation and caution against injecting views of individual stakeholders. In the full report, we have highlighted some key points of interest to help guide the reader. The report also raises questions about data that are not presented and, often, not available. We encourage other researchers and organizations to engage in further research as needed. A companion web site on the status of girls in Wisconsin offers detailed research appendices and is a rich resource for further information and investigation (see, www.statusofgirlsWI.org).

Acknowledgements. While there are many people who have contributed to the development of this project, the following individuals are specifically noted: Marsha Block, Mary Charles, Jim Henderson, Courtney Reed Jenkins, Shelly Schnupp, Judeen Schulte, Hilary Shager, Barbara Wyatt Sibley, and Courtney Wiher. Cover art, Lori Szarzynski. Report layout/design: Chris Renstrom.

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We gratefully acknowledge all of the collaborators who helped this report take shape.

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Girls by Race & Ethnicity	Girls Ages 10-19	
	WI	US
White	83%	69%
African American	9%	15%
Native American	1%	1%
Asian	3%	4%
Other Race	3%	7%
2 or More Races	2%	3%
Hispanic (any race)	6%	18%

* Total adds to more than 100% due to rounding.

Measuring Educational Attainment

One of the ways that Wisconsin measures academic progress is through the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Examination (WKCE). This is a statewide, standardized test administered to students in 3rd through 10th grade and is intended to test their knowledge in a variety of subjects (DPI, 2006b). Here is how the girls fared in some of these areas:

MATHEMATICS

Although girls more often obtain “Proficient” mathematics scores, boys more often obtain “Advanced” scores.

SCIENCE

Boys more often score at an “Advanced” level while girls more often score at a “Proficient” or “Basic” level.

LANGUAGE ARTS

Girls more often obtain “Advanced” scores and boys more often obtain “Proficient” scores. However, the percentage of both female and male students scoring at the “Advanced” levels decreases at higher grade levels.

READING

More than 40% of girls (grades 3 to 10) scored at the “Advanced” levels in 2005.

DEMOGRAPHICS

In 2005, a total of 738,955 young people between the ages of 10 and 19 lived in the State of Wisconsin, including 360,294 girls (49%) and 378,661 boys (51%). Of Wisconsin’s total population of 5.6 million, young people in this age group make up about 13% of the total population.

Girls in the 10-19 age group in Wisconsin are less diverse than girls in the U.S. as a whole, but more diverse than Wisconsin’s population of adult women. For example, there are nearly twice as many Hispanic and African American girls as women, as a share of Wisconsin’s population (Hispanic: 6% of girls compared to 3% of women; African American: 9% of girls compared to 5% of women).

EMPLOYMENT

Jobs for girls cluster in the hospitality, retail and other service areas. High school girls are likely to focus on “traditionally female” occupations.

In 2005, more than 60,000 Wisconsin girls, ages 16 to 19, were both in school and employed, working mainly in the retail and hospitality areas (USCB, 2005a).*

When anticipating future employment, Wisconsin high school girls are most likely to focus on traditional “female” employment categories, such as childcare and healthcare occupations versus typically “male” job categories such as engineering and science. This is bolstered by statistics showing that among students in high school vocational education courses, 88% of students in traditionally female course concentrations are girls, compared to 18% in traditionally male course concentrations (NWLC, 2007).

EDUCATION

In grades 9 to 12, 146,000 girls were enrolled in public schools and 13,000 were enrolled in private schools. Another relatively small percentage of high school girls in Wisconsin were home schooled.

In the 2004-2005 school year, about 91% of Wisconsin 12th grade girls graduated from high school with regular diplomas. However, racial disparities in graduation and dropout rates persist in Wisconsin schools (DPI 2006).

Girls who drop out of school cite many of the same contributing reasons as male dropouts – personality conflicts with educators, poor academic performance, lack of motivation, or disciplinary problems. Many girls also cite job-related reasons for dropping out. However, most girls who drop out do so primarily because of pregnancy and parenthood. Furthermore, female dropouts who do not have children when they leave school are more likely to become teenage mothers than are girls who remain in school (US DOJ, 1997).

ADVANCED PLACEMENT (AP) COURSES

In most AP courses in Wisconsin schools, the majority of students are female. However, girls tend to cluster in different courses than boys. In the 2004-2005 school year, more males than females took AP economics, physics, chemistry and calculus courses. Female students outnumbered male students in Spanish, French, art, government and politics, biology, statistics and probability, and mathematics (DPI, 2006a).

*Footnotes referenced in this Executive Summary are available in the full report and online at www.statusofgirlsWI.org.

TELEVISION & COMPUTERS

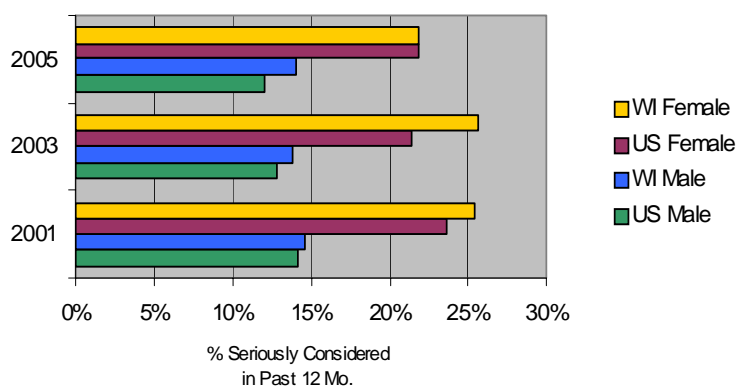
Girls tend to use computers for different purposes than boys – for socializing, learning, and getting answers to questions they are too uncomfortable to ask (GSUSA, 2002). Girls account for only about one-third of Wisconsin students "concentrating" (participating in a coherent sequence of three or more courses) in computer and data processing courses through high school career and technical education programs (NWLC, 2007). Regarding television usage, fewer girls than boys watch television for two or more hours at a time.

MENTAL HEALTH

DEPRESSION

In Wisconsin, as well as nationally, female high school students are more likely to report symptoms of clinical depression than are their male counterparts (DPI, Wisconsin Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2001-2005).

**High School Students Reporting Serious Consideration of Suicide,
United States and Wisconsin, 2001-2005**



SELF HARM

Adolescent girls are especially at risk for self-injury, as self-harming behaviors commonly appear in the early teen years, and females of any age are more likely to engage in self-injury than are their male counterparts (Mayo Clinic, 2006). For Wisconsin youth aged 10 to 17, self harm is the leading cause of injury-related hospitalizations (DHFS, 2006b).

EATING DISORDERS

In 2005, 8% of Wisconsin high school girls reported vomiting or using laxatives in the past month to lose weight or to maintain their current weight, compared to 6% of high school girls nationally (DPI, 2005).

JUVENILE CRIME

Most young women who become juvenile offenders begin with a "status offense"—a crime that is only a crime by virtue of the juvenile's age. Examples of status offenses include laws that prohibit underage drinking and curfew ordinances (Girls Incorporated, 2002b). Many girls in the juvenile justice system have experienced abuse in some form or another. Additional indicators of high-risk youth include separation or divorce in their families, living in poverty, witnessing violence, academic failure, and parents or relatives who are addicted to drugs or incarcerated (OJA, 2006).

Wisconsin High School Students' Reported Television Usage on an Average School Day, by Gender, 2005

	Girls	Boys
3 or more hours	23%	29%
2 hours	25%	27%
1 hour	21%	18%
< 1 hour	23%	19%
no television	9%	8%

Nationwide average for
3 or more hours per day

36% 38%

Note: Figures may not add to 100% due to rounding. Source: US DHHS, CDC, Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System.

Youth & Suicide

In 2005, about 22% of Wisconsin high school girls reported seriously considering suicide in the past year, compared to 14% of boys. Eleven percent of girls reported at least one suicide attempt in the past year, compared to 7% of boys. However, for Wisconsin youth ages 10 to 19, males actually commit suicide at more than twice the rate of females.

Source: U.S. Dept. of Health & Human Services, *Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance*, 1997, 1999, 2001, 2003 & 2005

Girls & Body Image

Wisconsin high school girls are far more likely to believe themselves to be overweight than to actually be overweight. In 2005, 36% of Wisconsin high school girls believed themselves to be slightly or very overweight, while only about 6% of the same population was actually overweight.

Wisconsin high school girls are also less likely to be overweight than high school girls in the U.S. as a whole – 6% in Wisconsin versus 10% nationally (DHHS).

Sexual Activity

In 2005, 32% of Wisconsin high school girls reported being sexually active and 40% reported that they had sexual intercourse at least once in their lifetime (DHHS, 2005a); while 25% of Wisconsin high school girls thought it was important to delay sex until marriage (DPI, 2005).

Forty-two percent of girls age 15 and younger who are having sex report that their first sexual intercourse was not consensual (UWGM, 2006).

REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH

In 2005, 32% of Wisconsin high school girls reported that they were currently sexually active (had sex at least once in the preceding month), compared to 27% of male students. Nationwide, 35% of girls reported that they were currently sexually active (DHHS, 2005a). Rates of sexual *intercourse* do not speak fully to rates of sexual *activity*. It is important to also consider the rates of oral sex and other sex acts, since sexual acts other than intercourse may precipitate sexual intercourse and can also spread sexually transmitted diseases (The Guttmacher Institute, 2004).

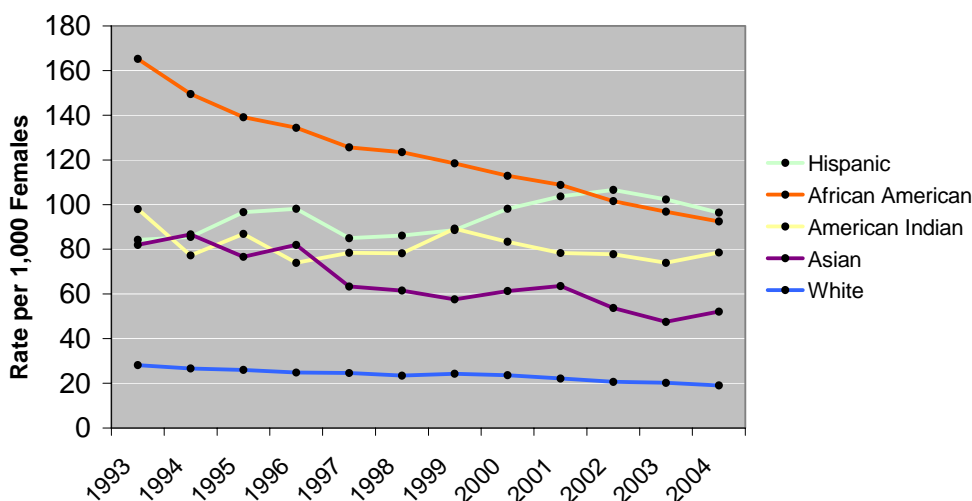
SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES (INFECTIONS)

Wisconsin girls aged 15-19 are three times more likely to have a reported Sexually Transmitted Disease (Infection) than are boys. One possible explanation is that the rates for cases of Chlamydia account for over half of the reported Sexually Transmitted Diseases (Infections) in Wisconsin girls (DHFS, 2006). According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), women can be easily re-infected with Chlamydia if their sex partners are not treated and adolescent girls are particularly susceptible to infection because the cervix is not fully mature.

TEEN PREGNANCY

Wisconsin's teen birth rates have remained below the national average. There are, however, racial/ethnic disparities among birth rates. Milwaukee ranks 7th for its teen birth rate among the nation's largest cities. Other Wisconsin cities also have high teen birth rates, including Racine, Green Bay and Beloit. Exceeding Milwaukee County's rate of births to teens under age 18 (5.2%) are Menomonee (6.9%) and Adams (6.8%) counties.

Birth Rates, Females Aged 15-19 Years, Wisconsin, by Race/Ethnicity, 1993-2004



Source: State of Wisconsin, DHFS, *Wisconsin Youth Sexual Behavior and Outcomes, 1993-2005, 2006*

SUBSTANCE & ALCOHOL USE

SMOKING

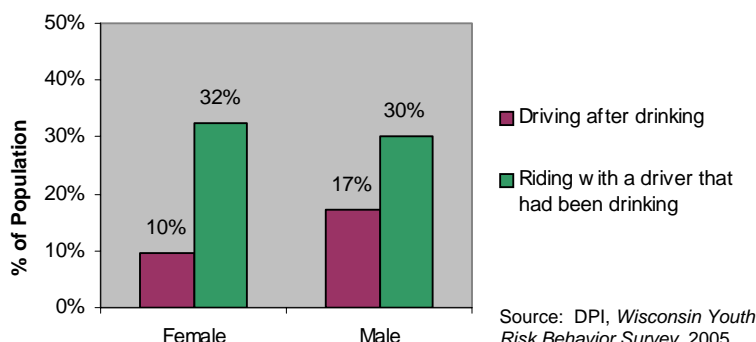
In 2005, 22% of Wisconsin high school girls were current smokers. Rates of smoking among Wisconsin high school students have been steadily declining in recent years. In 1999, 38% of Wisconsin high school girls were current smokers (DHFS, 2005).

DRINKING

In 2005, Wisconsin high school girls reported (DHHS, 2005a):

- Over 75% had consumed alcohol at least once in their lifetimes.
- About half had one or more alcoholic drinks in the past month.
- About one-third had five or more drinks in a row on at least one occasion in the past month.

**Wisconsin High School Students:
Driving After Drinking & Riding With a
Driver Who Had Been Drinking, 2005**



DRUG USE

In 2005, 35% of Wisconsin high school girls reported using marijuana at least once in their lives, and 16% reported using marijuana at least once in the past month. Cocaine use among high school girls in Wisconsin is 6.7% (ever used) and 2.2% (used in past month). Heroin (ever used) was reported at 1.7% and methamphetamine at 6.1%, while 5.0% of Wisconsin girls reported ever using club drugs (DHHS, 2001, 2004, and 2005).

VIOLENCE & ABUSE

In 2005, 60% of victims of child abuse and neglect in Wisconsin were girls. Girls were victimized at a rate of 8 per 1,000, compared to 5 per 1,000 for boys. Rates of abuse rise sharply after age 11 for Wisconsin girls, while rates for boys decline as they age. For girls 12 and over, the majority of substantiated allegations involved sexual abuse (DHFS, 2005).

Girls are less likely than boys to report physical fighting. In 2005, 7% of Wisconsin high school girls reported getting into a physical fight at school at least once in the preceding year, compared to 17% of their male counterparts in the state and about 9% of female high school students nationally (DHHS, 2005).

Drinking & Driving

In 2005, Wisconsin high school girls reported that in the past month nearly 10% had driven after drinking and almost one-third had ridden in a car with a driver who had been drinking (DPI, WI Youth Risk Behavior Survey, 2005)

Drug Usage Among Wisconsin High School Girls

Marijuana

35% - at least once in their lives

16% - in the past month

Methamphetamines

6% - at least once in their lives

Club Drugs

5% - at least once in their lives

Sexual Assault

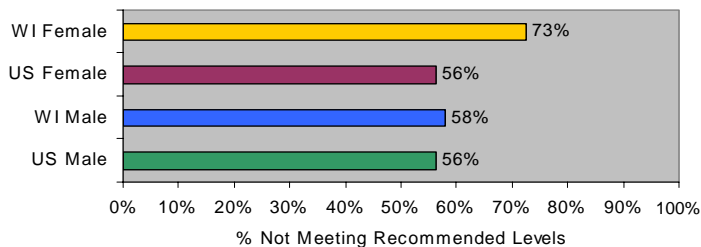
In 2004, 93% of perpetrators of reported sexual assault in Wisconsin were male. More than half of these perpetrators were teens, with 25% under age 15 at the time of the assault (OJA, 2005).

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

In 2005, 34% of Wisconsin high school girls reported they had not been physically active for at least an hour in the past week. Girls recognize the need for physical activity in maintaining a healthy lifestyle, but are not meeting recommended levels of activity (GS, 2006).

In 2005, 30% of Wisconsin high school girls reported that they were not enrolled in a physical education course, compared to 18% of their male peers (DPI, 2005a).

**High School Students Not Meeting
Recommended Levels of Physical Activity,
United States and Wisconsin, 2005**



Source: DPI, 2005a.

Physical Education in Wisconsin Schools

According to the Wisconsin Dept. of Public Instruction, children in seventh through twelfth grade are required to participate in an "instruction program of physical education." A Wisconsin high school student must achieve 1.5 credits of physical education courses over the course of three academic years.

SOCIAL SUPPORT

Wisconsin students were asked how many adults (besides their parents) they would feel comfortable seeking help from if there was an important question affecting their lives. Thirty percent of Wisconsin high school girls indicated that they had five or more such adults in their lives, 8% had four such adults, 16% had three, 24% had two, and 13% had one other such adult in their lives. Nine percent of Wisconsin high school girls indicated that there were no such adults in their lives (DPI, 2005a).

EXTRA/CO-CURRICULAR ACTIVITIES

In 2005, 35.5% of Wisconsin high school students participated in an academic extracurricular activity, and 19.9% participated in a music-based activity. Nationally, girls are more likely than boys to participate in academic organizations and music-related activities (DPI, 2006a).

Girls & Extracurricular Activities

National data collected in 2001 by the Girl Scouts of the US shows that adolescent girls are likely to participate in certain types of extracurricular activities based on their age group. As girls age, they are more likely to report participation in a community organization, student government, school clubs, and religious groups. Younger girls are more likely to participate in activities like cheerleading or dance and sports (Girl Scouts of the USA, 2002a).

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The full report on the Status of Girls in Wisconsin, along with contacts, research appendices and other information on topics addressed in the report, are available online at:

www.statusofgirlsWI.org

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